DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 324 809 EA 022 347

AUTHOR	Shrestha, Bijaya K.
TITLE	Crisis Management in the Schools: New Aspects of Professionalism.
INSTITUTION	Oregon School Study Council, Eugene.
REPORT NO	ISSN-0095-6694
PUB DATE	Oct 90
NOTE	32p.
AVAILABLE FROM	Publication Sales, Oregon School Study Council, University of Oregon, 1787 Agate Street, Eugene, OR 97403 ($6.00 prepaid; $2.00 postage and handling on billed orders).
PUB TYPE	Collected Works - Serials (022) -- Reports - Evaluative/Feasibility (142)
JOURNAL CIT	OSSC Bulletin; v34 n2 Oct 1990
EDRS PRICE	MF01/PC02 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS	*Administrator Responsibility; *Administrator Role; Administrators; *Crisis Intervention; *Educational Administration; Educational Policy; Elementary Secondary Education; Fire Protection; Natural Disasters; Organizational Effectiveness; Prevention; Professional Development; Public Relations; School Vandalism; Suicide
IDENTIFIERS	Emergencies

ABSTRACT

Effective crisis management as a function of the chief school administrator's role is examined. A new professionalism and recognition of districts and schools as complex organizations facilitate administrators' ability to handle this enlarged responsibility. Chapter 1 identifies forms of school crises and offers explanations, drawing upon organizational theories from social science. Chapter 2 presents a policy framework for two strategies of crisis management. Chapters 3 through 5 document the use of these strategies in the field, illustrated by the experiences of three schools or districts. Interviews with six administrators supplement the discussion. Chapter 6 concludes with field-based guidelines for effective and responsible crisis management. (16 references) (LMI)

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CRISIS MANAGEMENT IN THE SCHOOLS

New Aspects of Professionalism

Bijaya K. Shrestha

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Oregon School Study Council
October 1990 • Volume 34, Number 2

EA 022 347

BULLETIN

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ISSN 0095-6694
Nonmember price: $6.00
Member price: $4.50
Quantity Discounts:
10-24 copies - 15%
25-49 copies - 20%
50+ copies - 25%

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Preface

A preliminary ERIC search on crisis management in the schools yielded several hundred items on the topic. This statistic bears witness to the increasing level of turbulence in the schools and to the substantial resources spent to resolve them. Much of the scholarly research indicates that chief educational officers are equal to this enlarged responsibility because of their new professionalism, a quality that is beginning to make its presence felt at both the district and building levels of school policy.

This OSSC Bulletin focuses on the relevant and timely issue of the role of crisis management in the schools. It transmits the key finding that public-regarding behavior is a necessary component of all effective and responsive crisis management techniques. Effective crisis management is a function of the chief educational officer's cognizance of the district and each school as complex organizations that, in periods of crisis, require both flexible response and a climate of certainty.

Bijaya K. Shrestha, a member of the OSSC staff, received his master's degrees in public affairs and international studies from the University of Oregon. At present, he is a doctoral candidate in the University's Division of Educational Policy and Management.

Philip K. Piele
Executive Secretary

Introduction

Crisis is endemic to all professions, and the profession of education management is no exception. Frederick M. Wirt (1988) and L. Harmon Zeigler, Ellen Kehoe, and Jane Reisman (1985) remind us that the education profession spends a great deal of its time and energy managing various kinds of crises. Whereas in the past crisis management techniques in the schools emphasized identifying the crisis and then suppressing or institutionalizing it, the recent trend indicates a more sophisticated approach of accommodating competing public claims without surrendering professional norms.

To explain this policy shift, Wirt advances the proposition that men and women in current school leadership roles today are significantly younger and are more highly educated than the previous generation of education leaders. Consequently, the new leadership tends to be more open and responsive than the former generation and seeks new answers to old questions. In other words, they view education systems as complex organizations that are interdependent and interactive with their environments, and they believe that these systems can be responsive to the public claims made on them.

The new leaders may have a more sophisticated perspective than that of the former generation on the complex issues of education. As a result, they subscribe to different notions of education policy and management than those held by their predecessors. Their age and education may contribute to their view of schools as open systems where no one best way exists to manage schools: both policy and management are context-dependent and vary with the changing needs of the schools.

The evidence reported in this Bulletin supports the theory that today's school district leaders are more responsive and professional in managing school-related crises. The majority of current school leaders are more innovative and interact more closely with their work environments than did the previous generation of leaders. These characteristics of the new education leaders influence the way they define, manage, and resolve crises.

The definition of crisis takes many turns both in the social science

literature and in practical school policy. This Bulletin defines *crisis* as an expression of traumatic school-related experiences or physical disasters experienced at both the individual and the collective levels. Such catastrophes include student suicides, fires, and vandalism. Some of the sources of these crises and their possible ramifications are identified.

Chapter 1 identifies some of the forms school crises may assume and seeks to explain their causes, drawing upon the social science literature on organizations. Chapter 2 presents a policy framework to organize crisis management styles in two strategies. Chapters 3 through 5 document the use of these strategies in the field, drawing upon the experiences of three schools or districts. And chapter 6 concludes with some field-based guidelines that school leaders can use to effectively and responsibly manage crises in the schools.

Thanks go to the following individuals for providing valued assistance in the interviewing and other preparatory stages of this Bulletin: Lynn Armstrong, Industrial Indemnity; Larry Austin, Oregon Department of Education; Bill Garbett, Portland School District; Ken Johnson, Veneta Elementary School; Charles W. Wiltse, Jr., Baker School District; and Mike Shields, Molalla High School.

Chapter 1

Professionalism and Crisis Management in the Schools

In the past, school managers tended to look at any crisis as a deviation from the norm and did their best to avoid or block it. The school managers' training and outlook influenced this perspective. Many of them received their training in colleges of educational administration that stressed "a good school system was good for everybody, not just one segment of society" and therefore crises of any kind had no place in education (Frederick M. Wirt and Michael W. Kirst 1982).

Moreover, education managers held up their technical competence as their claim to sanctioned public authority. Wirt and Kirst (1982) explain that such claims rested on the assumption that scientific techniques of educational administration were independent of the demands and values of competing groups that support local public education. Consequently, school managers were to demonstrate their mastery of scientific and neutral techniques by emphasizing nonpolitical control, expertise, and efficiency and by centralizing authority in their offices. Rephrased, these managers believed in one best way to direct and administer public school systems, and they were convinced that they had mastered it through education and experience.

The scientific management movement and its legacy to crisis management strategies have now fallen in disrepute among education scholars and practitioners. While crisis management by avoidance and blocking may have worked in the past, studies in educational administration undertaken within the past ten years suggest that such a proposition may have had a less-than-salutary effect on school leadership. Zeigler and his associates assert that such a strategy unnecessarily enlarges the scope of the crisis and thereby makes it more difficult to resolve:

> The broader the [crisis]—the more public and visible the arena—the less relevant to [crisis] management become the resources of the

> expert. The frustrations of experts at the inutility of rational argument [emerge because] political leaders, whose resources are electoral, achieve success by symbol manipulation, especially by the introduction of symbols denoting an enemy....These kinds of symbols are, as noted, foreign to nonelected but publicly accountable executives. In fact, such executives lack effective ways of responding to symbol manipulation. (1985)

This observation is supported by the perspective from the field. Because effective crisis management is a function of responsive leadership, the neutral management style and its concomitant crisis management strategy of avoidance and blocking have systematically eroded leadership qualities in the schools. The erosion persists partly because of the confusion over the meaning of the concept of professionalism applied to education policy and management. The practitioner's viewpoint clearly makes this point. James Enochs, assistant superintendent of the Modesto (California) public schools, wrote in 1981 that the schools needed more responsive and effective leadership than they had at the time:

> Let's face it, there is something wrong with a profession in which the two most popular workshops for the putative leaders of the profession are stress management and planning for early retirement. It does not inspire confidence to see administrators spending their time preparing for breakdown or escape. And *confidence is the most important currency of leadership* [emphasis in original].

The following discussion attempts to document and explain the new direction of professionalism in education. The new direction has begun to combine or replace the chief educational officer's technical role with that of the professional role. This discussion attempts to clarify the relationship of professionalism to crisis management at the district and building levels.

A Modern Definition of 'Professionalism'

The following principles organize the different aspects of professionalism. First, professionalism is a type of monopoly (Jeffrey Berlant 1975). Second, the direct application of powerful knowledge is another definition of professionalism (Bernard Barber 1978). Third, a specialized market organized around skill and organization is professionalism (Magali Larson 1977). Finally, professionalism is a control mechanism embodied by a medieval guild (Corinne Gilb 1966).

The four principles of professionalism are ordered within two perspectives. First, Talcott Parsons (1954) developed the functional perspective, stating that professionalism's central tenet is a public-service or community-oriented ethic that applies authoritative knowledge to critical public policies.

Second, the trait school has identified and compiled more than twenty-three specific characteristics that are common to professions (Geoffrey Millerson 1964). This compilation is not useful in the absence of guiding theory. Most social scientists have reduced the number of traits to five. Professionals subscribe to these five traits, which portray a sense of community shared by professionals:

1. There is present a highly generalized and systematized knowledge that is applicable to clients.
2. Membership is limited to formally qualified individuals deemed fit to provide this service through extensive formal training.
3. The service is provided foremost to benefit the community and not the professional.
4. Socialization and codes of conduct ensure uniformity of the standards of knowledge and its application.
5. The benefit to society contributed by professionals is rewarded by a substantial grant of autonomy in their work, but they are also responsible to those they serve and the total society.

In the above principles, the functional and trait perspectives both converge on a definition of *professionalism* as competency and expertise placed at the service of the public. Professionalism both contributes to and is responsive to the public interest.

Professionalism Translated into Crisis Management

When the functional and trait perspectives on professionalism are applied to the schools, the importance of responsive and effective leadership in crisis situations becomes clear. The chief educational officer demonstrates his or her responsive and effective leadership in crisis situations mainly in two ways:

1. *Mobilize Support.* The traditional role of the chief educational officer—that of a technician—was that of system maintenance, performed solely within the district or the building. The new role of the chief educational officer as a political professional is that of policy management. The shift toward professionalism calls the chief educational officer to uphold and strengthen professional norms by mobilizing citizen support and effectively interacting with the dominant policy groups at local, state, and federal levels of government.

2. *Be Sensitive to the Needs of Lay Groups.* Because the traditional belief that there is "one best way" to lead and direct school policy has now been shown to be ineffective, chief educational officers should be sensitive to the needs of lay groups not previously served. As James Enochs (1981)

reminded us, the schools need more responsive and effective leadership today because education has shifted from a low-visibility and low-crisis entity to a condition of high political turbulence and crisis because of the claims of groups not heretofore considered. Educational leadership's sensitivity to the needs of bypassed groups may take time; but it can yield new perspectives on the hidden and unintended consequences of school policy on persons whose needs are not being served. Consequently, school leaders can design new programs to anticipate and counteract the negative effects of traditional school policy.

Responsive and effective crisis management is a function of the new professionalism that is beginning to have an impact at both the district and building levels. Such leadership is a key variable in the chief educational officer's shift from the role of the neutral technician to that of the policy professional. This change in attitude and behavior can explain some of the characteristics of modern and effective school leadership in times of crisis.

Chaper 2 presents a policy framework that can be helpful to the practitioner in understanding the relationship between attitudinal and behavioral characteristics and field-based techniques of crisis resolution.

Chapter 2

Two Strategies of Crisis Management

According to James G. March and Herbert Simon (1957), administrative behavior in times of crises can be divided into "technocratic-analytic" and "political-bargaining" strategies. Technocratic-analytic behavior is rational behavior that depends upon expertise, staff information, professional norms, and chain-of-command structures to resolve crises. Clearly defined goals and discrete cause-effect relationships guide this behavior. This strategy assumes a closed system of logic.

Political-bargaining behavior relies on canvassing, persuasion, negotiation, and compromise to bring crises to a close. This strategy assumes an open system of logic. Because of the ambiguity in ascertaining cause-effect relationships, it distinguishes between goals that are professionally desirable and those that are politically attainable.

If technocratic-analytic behavior is rational, then political-bargaining behavior is not so much irrational as it is nonrational. Technocratic-analytic behavior accounts for the purely technical aspects of crisis management whereas political-bargaining behavior considers values and preferences of the students, teachers, staff, and community toward the school in periods of crisis. The technocratic-analytic strategy is especially relevant to practitioners because all too often in the wake of a disaster school managers realize that "many things they planned to do should have already been done" (Lester Perry 1989).

The chief educational officer's public responsibility of effective crisis management includes using both technocratic-analytic and political-bargaining strategies. Such responsive and public-regarding behavior makes him or her a professional.

The scholarly literature on professionalism is supported by the practical literature on the same topic.

J. William Jones (1982) quotes a publication of the American Association of School Administrators (AASA) that tells school officials to refocus the educational community's attention toward "what is best for the kids" by following these guidelines:

- Estimate the degree of emotionality of all groups.
- Drum up an environment that is conducive to teacher and staff renewal.
- Keep all teachers and staff thoroughly briefed on all relevant aspects of how the crisis may affect them.
- Spearhead a drive to involve all members of the educational community.

Codes of Conduct during Crises

Further translating the AASA's guidelines into practical recommendations, Jones proposes six codes of conduct that can strengthen the district or building executive's ability to bring order to the education community in the aftermath of crises. Jones's six recommendations are meant for principals facing the repercussions of a teachers' strike, but they are also applicable to other school crises such as student suicides and school property damage caused by fires, explosions, and earthquakes. The six codes are paraphrased as follows:

1. To mitigate the consequences of the crisis, the chief educational officer's dealings with all those who are affected by the crisis must be clear and consistent.
2. After the crisis, the chief educational officer's principal focus must be on the instructional program and what is best for students.
3. After the crisis, the chief educational officer must clearly define the boundaries of acceptable behavior to both students and staff. The consequences must be clearly and concisely spelled out for failing to stay within these boundaries. The boundaries are meant to strengthen relationships, not to punish students or staff.
4. The chief educational officer must impartially and effectively implement the decisions taken to mitigate the effects of the crisis.
5. The chief educational officer must be watchful for possible disputes between teachers, staff, and the community and move quickly resolve them. In other words, the chief educational officer must personally intervene to isolate, localize, and resolve conflicts before they spread to other areas of school policy.
6. Anger and bitterness are to be expected in the aftermath of a crisis. The chief educational officer must anticipate these feelings

to resolve the challenge to authority that can arise from them.

Jones's six codes of conduct guide many schools' crisis management plans. An example is Malolla (Oregon) High School's crisis management plan, quoted as follows:

1. Inform parents of students. Inform parents on all necessary aspects of the incident. Include only essential information on who, where, when, how, and why the incident occurred.
2. Inform school staff by phone or staff meeting, or both.
   A. This is an administrative process. The staff member who learns about the incident collects as much information as possible and informs the principal. The principal then informs staff by a phone tree system.
   B. Present facts only. If possible, hold a staff meeting to insure that all are working with and from the same information.
   C. Request teachers to discuss only the facts surrounding the incident. If the incident is an accident, teachers should challenge any student's attempt to glamorize suicide. Inform the counseling center of any students who glamorize suicide and request that they receive counseling. The facts of death, the pain, and suffering of the surviving family members, friends, and relatives are appropriate topics of discussion.
   D. Ask staff to be especially alert to the victims' close friends who seem unusually depressed or withdrawn. If such behavior persists, request counselors to meet with these students in a pre-selected area so that they can as a group work through the pain, anger, and hurt. It is imperative that counselors emphasize not to dwell on the incident. It is necessary to get back to normal school life as soon as appropriately possible.
3. Inform the students.
   A. Disseminate accurate information.
   B. Students should clearly hear these messages:
      (i) No one caused this incident.
      (ii) No one needs to be guilty because of it.
      (iii) Counselors are ready to talk to students and teachers to talk about their worries.
      (iv) This is the time for the school community to support each other in the coming days and weeks.
      (v) After releasing the information, the school day should continue as scheduled. Depending upon how the information affects the students, teachers can decide whether or not to follow the lesson plan for the day. Students who are especially distraught should be referred

to the counseling center.

4. Be watchful in the days to come. Support and watch students in the days and weeks following a tragedy. The entire school staff should do this. Anyone behaving differently from usual should be referred for counseling.
5. Provide staff support. Give every consideration to the caretakers. They should be looked after and taken care of in the same manner as students. Staff members may be one of those most seriously affected because they may not take the time to work through their own grief.
6. Get all necessary information on the memorial. Students may wish to attend a memorial, if one is held. Students should be encouraged to attend if it is appropriate to do so. The bereaved family's wishes should be honored as to whether or not attendance is invited.
7. Work with the press. The chief educational officer should deal with the press to ascertain that accurate information is given out. He or she does this to reduce the probability of the press to give the incident front-page coverage with photographs. A responsible press will honor such a request because low-profile coverage will decrease the probability of imitative incidents. (Molalla High School 1988)

The Context of Crisis Management

Effective crisis management always is contextual. The value of contextuality lies in the chief educational officer's sensitivity to shifting contexts and adapting his or her leadership style to them. Effective crisis management is a function of leadership that is neither in front of nor behind the school constituency. Because school disasters can polarize students, teachers, staff, and community into divergent positions, the chief educational officer must move quickly to refocus the differing opinions of the education community toward a shared goal: *the education of children*.

Chief educational officers use the technocratic-analytic and political-bargaining strategies in their attempts to devise contexts that generate win-win situations for all involved parties. Notwithstanding the fact that the outcomes of crises entail relative winners and losers, the chief educational officers craft effective tradeoffs that are acceptable to all those who are affected by the crisis.

In summary, crisis management is one of the responsibilities of the chief educational officer. Today's professionals regard crises as a normal aspect of education policy and management in part because of the new claims on the schools of students, teachers, and lay groups not heretofore considered.

Chief educational officers use both aspects of the technocratic-analytic and the political-bargaining managerial roles to anticipate and counteract or meet these claims by resolving the crises that emerge from them. The technocratic-analytic role is sufficient to resolve crises that have clear and closed cause-effect relationships, such as fires and earthquakes.

The political-bargaining role is necessary for resolving crises that are ambiguous and have open-ended cause-effect relationships. The cause-effect relationships are unclear because of multiple sources of causation.

The next three chapters, joining the theory sketched in the previous pages to practice, report on the new role of the chief educational officer as a professional who applies both the technocratic-analytic and political-bargaining managerial roles in formulating and implementing school policy in times of crisis.

Chapter 3

Fire Destroys Baker High School

"The main principle of crisis management is to provide for the orderly movement of people to places where the danger is minimum. If the school building is on fire or if the threat of an explosion exists, safety lies in being outside," stated Charles W. Wiltse, Jr., superintendent of Baker (Oregon) School District. Wiltse draws upon his experience of effectively managing the crisis caused by the fire that razed almost the entire Baker High School building in February 1989.

"The fire was probably caused by an overheated pipe in the air-handling unit above the ceiling," Wiltse said. "These types of fires are difficult to detect and control. As a result, they spread quickly and cause much damage," he added. However, no personal injuries occurred because of the effective crisis management plan he had established in the district.

No school is immune from disasters such as fires. Wiltse says, "Fires are among the most common causes of school property damage. Unfortunately, perfect immunity to fires is not a realistic assumption."

Wiltse has learned from experience the value of training and preparation in reducing the probability and damage of fires. "Disaster preparedness planning and the systematic training and holding of fire and other emergency drills and exercises are effective measures to reduce injury to life and loss of life as well as diminishing property damage," he said. The district regularly conducts fire and disaster preparedness training and simulation exercises.

Oregon School Law and Public Safety

The district's fire and disaster preparedness program is in compliance with Oregon school law, which mandates that each school instruct its stu-

dents on fire safety and fire drill procedures. Also, Oregon school law requires that schools conduct fire drills at least once a month and that they be documented.

The district designed and implemented an eleven-step procedure that complies with the stipulations of Oregon school law. A district publication summarizes the eleven steps as follows:

1. The fire alarm is one that cannot be confused with other signals and will alert teachers and students to leave the building.
2. In the event of fire, the fire department should be called immediately after the evacuation alarm is sounded.
3. A plan for evacuation of the school building in the shortest possible time shall be developed and posted in all areas.
4. Alternate exits should be designated if usual exits are blocked.
5. Rules for evacuating the building must be made available to all pupils and staff members.
6. Instructions to students should be clear regarding coats, books, and other belongings. Evacuation must be immediate. Belongings should be left behind.
7. Certain school personnel should be designated to check all rooms, including restrooms, so that no one remains in the building.
8. Each teacher should be responsible for the closing of doors and windows in the classroom.
9. Building exit guards should be designated and stationed to prevent unauthorized return of students to classrooms.
10. Principals should consult local fire departments in developing an evacuation plan and in conducting drills.
11. The principal shall designate assembly areas so each teacher may account for his/her students. (Baker School District 5J, n.d.)

The district's eleven-step process is directed at ensuring the health, safety, and welfare of students, staff, and community members who use the school facilities as well as protecting the facilities themselves. Because both the means and ends are relatively clear, the above procedure is an example of the technocratic-analytic strategy applied to crisis resolution.

The Technocratic-Analytic Strategy

Applied to crisis management in the schools, the technocratic-analytic strategy involves planning, organizing, leading, and controlling both assets and activities. These qualities are critical immediately before, during, and after an actual or impending property loss to minimize the loss of resources essential to the school district's speedy and complete recovery.

Some aspects of reasoned anticipation (before the crisis) and prediction (after the crisis) are necessary for the technocratic-analytic management strategy to be effective in school property crisis management. As Wiltse points out, "A crisis introduces potentially uncontrollable stress and emergency situations which can only be managed with preplanning. The ideal response would be to have the right people in control and trained to the degree that their actions would be automatic. Police and fire departments are the best examples that typify these kinds of programmatic response."

Anticipation: Before the Crisis

Crisis managers who use the technocratic-analytic strategy seek to anticipate behaviors and events in the areas of structure, order, and discipline. An example of a crisis preparation plan that takes into account these factors is a working paper of the Oregon School Boards Association:

1. Factors affecting building occupants' susceptibility to injury by fire: age; mobility; awareness of the fire; knowledge of the environment; density-crowding; control of occupants.
2. A crisis management team should be selected with consideration of these factors: physically able to carry out emergency duties; normally available on premises; cross-trained; willing to follow orders; able to function under stress.
3. Prepare a crisis management procedures manual, including: purpose and organization of manual; chain of command and responsibilities of emergency teams; evacuation instructions, loss prevention and loss reduction procedures; addresses and telephone numbers for contacting outside fire, police, medical, pollution control, and other sources of help; communication procedures to be followed during and after the emergency. (Charles Wiltse, n.d.)

Prediction: After the Crisis

Examples of predictive behavior in the technocratic-analytic strategy applied to crisis management include prompt reporting, cooperation with the fire and police officials, and protection of school property from further damage. The Oregon School Boards Association's working paper condenses these principles as follows:

1. Report loss promptly to agent and company. Select a spokesperson and have them schedule a meeting; spokesperson schedules a meeting with adjuster within 24 hours to inspect damage. Avoid being pressured into hasty decisions by contractors or public adjusters.
2. Cooperate with fire and police officials, as well as the insurance carrier in investigating the loss. Make any requested materials, such as building plans, recent repair invoices, and documents,

available. Make school personnel available; this is not the time for vacations.

3. Protect property from further damage. It is a policy condition to mitigate the loss, for example: (a) utilize maintenance people or local contractors to facilitate temporary repairs: cover hole in roof, board up doors and windows, remove water from floors, move undamaged contents to safe place; (b) use outside contractors or vendors, if necessary, to expedite cleaning smoke and water damaged contents, servicing office machines and computers, which is crucial within the first 72 hours; (c) erect barricades and/or security fences, consider possible use of an interim security guard.
4. Convene school board meeting and pass emergency resolution. This eliminates the public bid requirement and facilitates rapid repair.
5. Choose architect and contractor wisely. Both should have prior experience with school fire work (ask for references). Each should be compatible with the other, ensuring an effective working relationship. The contractor should be bondable and have an adequate crew.
6. Finalize agreements on bids solicited after scope of repairs and contractors.
7. Solicit bids for contents items from your normal vendors and set delivery time. Most vendors will set orders at present cost and hold until the building is ready for occupancy.

In summary, the technocratic-analytic strategy emphasizes programmatic response to crises such as fires. This strategy attempts to reduce uncertainty in the environment by anticipation and in the organization through prediction. The chief educational officer works toward these goals by emphasizing standardization of procedures such as the fire and disaster preparedness and planning programs.

Crises strike all schools in the forms of fires, windstorms, floods, bomb threats, explosions, and other disasters. Effective crisis management requires preparedness planning as well as the systematic execution of emergency drills and exercises. As demonstrated by the experience of the Baker School District, the technocratic-analytic strategy has value in managing crises caused by physical disasters. This strategy is particularly effective in resolving school property disasters because the cause-effect relationship can be reasonably ascertained, with only a slight margin of error. The technocratic-analytic strategy places a premium on the planning processes and the emergency drills so as to secure the safety of students, staff, and patrons during their use of school facilities.

The next chapter documents the experience of Veneta Elementary School in managing crisis caused by a fire that destroyed a large portion of that school.

Chapter 4

Fire Damages Veneta Elementary School

"The principal factor in the case of a fire is the safety of the students and the staff," said Ken Johnson, principal of Veneta (Oregon) Elementary School. Johnson was referring to the fire that destroyed eight of the thirteen classrooms and damaged the library and the restroom facilities. The fire, set by three grade-school students in October 1989, cost the Fern Ridge School District approximately $1 million.

"The fire was a traumatic experience for students, staff, and the community," Johnson said. "You have to remember that students and staff lost many valued belongings in the fire. Some of the teachers lost personal belongings that they had accumulated over eighteen years."

Because of the trauma and anxiety caused by the fire, Johnson's first duty was to get the teachers and staff together as a team. Then he had to convince them they could together work out the pain and confused emotions caused by the damage. "There had to be a period of grieving before we could begin putting together the pieces," he explained.

The Value of Teamwork

Johnson's handling of the crisis is a good example of the value of the political-bargaining strategy in resolving crises that generate much uncertainty because of the open-endedness of the crisis. While the cause of the fire itself was certain, the effects of the fire were far from certain. Consequently, Johnson had to work in an ambiguous context, or in an open system of logic, to anticipate the probable effects of the fire: "When disasters of this magnitude strike, the entire school has to stress teamwork to cope with them. Teamwork was essential to ensure cooperation in making do with the five

remaining classrooms."

Johnson's remark demonstrates the utility of the political-bargaining strategy in individualizing crises and thereby limiting their scope. It is also an effective method of warding off a chain of other unanticipated but related crises:

> Because both teachers and specialists were distraught over losing their classrooms and equipment, I had to get everybody concerned to come to a consensus on how to juggle 320 students in five classrooms. I did not make an arbitrary decision on how to divide the classrooms. The teachers and staff themselves had to do this. To facilitate this, I divided the teachers and staff into two teams and had the two teams consult each other on how to share the classrooms. This worked well. Everybody was very cooperative. We divided the use of classrooms by grade-level. The specialists were accommodating in making do with the hallways.

Johnson's crisis management skills enabled the school and the community to quickly recover from the crisis. The purposive behavior of both the school staff and the community aided in facilitating speedy repair and reconstruction of the school. "We were up and running in three days after the fire; we hope to have the school fully ready by the fall of 1990," he said.

The Political-Bargaining Strategy

Johnson's team-building concept is an offshoot of the political-bargaining strategy. One aspect of this strategy, touched upon in chapter 2, entails limiting the scope of the crisis by individualizing it and thereby effectively isolating it from interacting with the environment.

Limiting the scope of the crisis prevents it from spreading to other policy domains. Key to the success of the political-bargaining strategy applied to crisis resolution lies in keeping the crisis small. The bigger the crisis, the bigger is its solution, which in turn generates unanticipated consequences with which the chief educational officer must contend.

Johnson's success in limiting the crisis by providing stability and establishing structure through team-building in a turbulent environment speaks for the value of the political-bargaining strategy in crisis management. The key aspects of successful team-building can be identified and separated into three consecutive steps:

1. *Facilitate.* The chief educational officer brings together all concerned individuals affected by the crisis and initiates a dialogue among them.

2. *Negotiate.* The chief educational officer guides the dialogue toward a decision satisfactory to all involved in the crisis.

3. *Oversee.* The chief educational officer ensures compliance with the

agreement by turning over to the concerned individuals themselves the responsibility of implementing the agreed-upon decision. The chief educational officer differentiates between bargaining on the decision and bargaining on its implementation. Rephrased, he or she provides strong leadership in ascertaining that the agreed-upon decision is carried out without any alterations in the implementation phase. Leadership during this phase is critical to ensure the justness of the decision to all those who agreed to abide by it.

The political-bargaining strategy applied to crisis management works well in turbulent environments because it forces the chief educational officer to face contingencies as well as constraints. Contingencies refer to the interdependencies of the different groups and functions of the school. Constraints are the limits imposed upon the school by factors such as budgets and the technical and political feasibility of plans. Because of these contingencies and constraints, the chief educational officer decides when and how to act guided by the cues from the environment itself. This strategy requires the chief educational officer to interact closely with the school environment to assess what responses may be feasible in resolving the crisis.

In summary, this chapter highlights the applicability of the political-bargaining approach to crises generated in open systems of logic. This strategy is particularly useful during crises with ambiguous cause-effect relationships. Events in schools, as in all social institutions, often have multiple and reciprocal causes and effects. In such situations, the chief educational officer operates in an open system of logic—faced with uncertainty while at the same time subject to certain criteria of rationality.

Because of the traumatic effects of the fire, Veneta Elementary School found itself in a turbulent and uncertain environment. At the same time, the school had to meet its goal of continuing its teaching and service mission as soon as possible.

The next chapter turns to Molalla High School, which used a mix of both the technocratic-analytic and the political-bargaining strategies in crisis management.

Chapter 5

Accident Kills Four Molalla High School Students

Molalla (Oregon) High School experienced a crisis that called for both the technocratic-analytic and the political-bargaining strategies. Mike Shields, principal, tells of an automobile accident that claimed four students' lives in December 1988. The cause of death was clear, as was the immediate consequence of the loss of four students' lives. But other effects and consequences remained to be discovered. The school, for instance, was not sure exactly how these deaths would affect the other students, the teachers, and the staff.

Because of the complexity and ambiguity in ascertaining all cause-effect relationships present in the crisis, Shields's crisis management style in this particular incident demonstrates aspects of both the technocratic-analytic and political-bargaining strategies. His management style was technocratic-analytic because he laid out a series of logical steps specifically designed to reduce the traumatic impact of the accident on other students, teachers, and staff. Shields's style could also be classified as political-bargaining because he exhibited aspects of anticipation by preparing for possible and unexpected effects from this crisis.

Immediate Steps

After being informed of the car accident, Shields made three decisions. First, he informed the parents of the accident. Second, he contacted the press to ensure that the accident was accurately and appropriately reported in the newspapers. And third, Shields held an emergency meeting with the students and the entire school staff to comfort and console the grieving students in the aftermath of the accident. As Shields explains: "The first day after the

accident, I encouraged the teachers and the staff to spend the first half of the next day after the accident to comfort and console the students. You have to realize the extent of the impact that the death of these four students had on our 150 students."

Drawing upon his experience in managing this crisis as well as others in the past, Shields observes that each crisis is unique and that a general crisis management plan had to be flexibly applied to the tragedy. (The crisis management plan of Molalla High School is quoted in chapter 2.)

Combination of Strategies

A mix of technocratic-analytic and political-bargaining strategies demonstrates the paradoxical attempt of chief educational officers to reduce uncertainty through the technocratic-analytic strategy while simultaneously searching for flexibility through the political-bargaining strategy.

Chief educational officers' mix of strategies is a dual-purpose mechanism that reduces uncertainty induced by the crisis. This mechanism functions in two ways. First, the mechanism enables the chief educational officers to establish increasing levels of flexibility in positions that have greater responsibility in the hierarchical ladder. This process establishes the basis for each hierarchical layer's actions, which in turn serve as the premise for the actions of the next lower level. And second, it frees the chief educational officer to respond to and interact with the demands of the environment to resolve the crisis.

Crises that include the human element call for a mix of the technocratic-analytic and the political-bargaining management styles. Because the human element is unpredictable, the technocratic-analytic strategy alone is not sufficient for crisis resolution. The technocratic-analytic strategy depends upon a closed system of logic as exemplified by linear cause/effect problem-resolving techniques. Any crisis that affects individuals entails uncertainty and therefore requires a crisis management style based upon an open system of logic. The successful experience of Molalla High School demonstrates the efficacy of combining both the technocratic-analytic and political-bargaining management styles to effectively manage crises that affect both individuals and schools.

Conclusion and Guidelines

Effective and responsive crisis management is a function of the new professionalism of school and district leaders. This perspective upholds public-regarding values without surrendering professional norms. Because professionalism's key variable is publicly granted autonomy, chief educational officers can keep that privilege only if their actions are in the public interest. Such actions become especially important in the methods used by chief educational officers to anticipate, meet, and resolve crises in ways acceptable to all those who are affected by them.

Chief educational officers can discharge their public duties by deciding for themselves which strategy or mix of strategies is most appropriate to the crisis at hand. There are no recipes for "how to effectively and responsibly resolve crises." That is, there is no one right way to resolve crises.

Such an awareness will enhance and augment the new professionalism in the schools. And it will greatly improve the quality of policy delivery as played out in chief educational officers' attempts at managing crisis.

Because context-specific steps to resolve crises that have multiple sources of causation are not realistic, this Bulletin closes with a set of general guidelines that can serve as a framework for chief educational officers in their efforts to be effective and responsive crisis managers. They assume the principal responsibility of resolving crises in the schools. The chief educational officers' responsibility is to determine for themselves whether or not the guidelines are sufficient and necessary for the crisis at hand.

1. Include crisis management techniques in the district and building professional development programs.

2. Ascertain that the interoffice communications line, such as the phone tree, always is in functioning order.

3. Establish the rule of holding before-school meetings with all staff to deal with crises when they occur.

4. Give the press pertinent information. Discourage the press from sensationalizing the story.

5. At the district level, transmit the necessary information to the principals and, if relevant, the counseling coordinators of the other schools in the district.

6. In the case of death, prepare a concise report explaining its circumstances. Stick to description; avoid analysis. Inform the students how the death is affecting or will affect the school. Tell them what services are available to them. Contact the bereaved family to learn the time of the funeral and whether or not the school community is permitted to attend. If permission is forthcoming, release students, teachers, and staff to attend the funeral.

7. Designate a school official to collect, organize, and disseminate the necessary information on the crisis. At the district level, announce that using assemblies to discuss the tragedy is not recommended.

8. Send letters of appreciation to all the individuals who aided you in resolving the crisis.

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Appendix 16

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March 29, 1991